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LANDLORDISM IN AMERICA.

IN pursuance of the plan announced in the prospectus of the NORTH AMERICAN REVIEW for 1886, a special commissioner was deputed to personally investigate the present condition of land-lordism in the States of Illinois, Iowa, Kansas, Nebraska, and Dakota. His report is subjoined.—EDITOR.

I.

No one can study the American land question and fail to have his imagination struck by the unexpected analogies that will appear between the agrarian concerns of the American Republic and those of ancient Rome. The Romans, too, had their public domain, of which they were exceedingly proud, with a free farm thereon (in theory) for every citizen; and so serene did this make them feel, that, until the agitation of Licinius Stolo, year of the City 378, they could not be got to seriously understand that there was such a thing as a Roman land question. Now, nothing can be more remarkable in the United States to-day—year of the Republic 109—than the Roman serenity of the people and government on all affairs relating to the land. Why should we bother ourselves about the land? they say, with an imperial gesture (exactly like the Romans in talking of their *ager publicus*), why should we be so silly as to anticipate trouble about the land in a country with a public domain like ours?

But Rome found the *ager publicus* all too helpless to stem the progress of agrarian disease once it had fairly set in. Let us be sure that America is not already in the first stages of the very disease that Rome died of. "*Latifundia*"—that is its name in economic pathology, land monopoly we may translate it—"latifundia," says Pliny, "killed Italy." Why should it not kill America too, if the remedies be not applied in time?

The fact is, America has refused to avail herself of one of the most vital of the advantages that she became heir to by virtue of

her late entry into the family of nations. She has refused to benefit by the bitter experience of Europe in regard to the land question. From any of her elder sisters of the Old World she might have learned what a Pandora's box of evils an ill-favored land system is; she might have heard them bemoaning the day they ever allowed certain forms of tenure to grow into their soil, and envying America the measureless and virgin territory on which she could experiment with intelligent caution, having their mistakes before her eyes. Even since the founding of the Republic, revolutions and agrarian agitations in Europe have furnished her with many a violent and awful proof of the curses entailed on a country by improper dealing with its land. But America has paid no heed. Taken up with the phenomena of her marvelous growth and prosperity, secure in the vastness of her area and the noble freedom of her political institutions, she has indulged an unthinking optimism, which under the circumstances is hardly unnatural. [With more than one other troublesome social problem, she has left the land question to shift for itself. And the American land question appears to have been shifting for itself with a vengeance.]

II.

It is hard to say which is the more surprising: the extent to which the system popularly known as landlordism has gained a footing on American soil, or the ignorance of the American people about the matter. The average American has a vague but rooted idea that the agriculture of his country is carried on by farmers who are the owners of the farms they till. With a great public domain, of which every man who chooses can possess himself of a hundred and sixty acres, he cannot conceive of any farmer tilling land that does not belong to him, and paying for the privilege of doing so into the bargain. If you ask him whether the landlord and tenant system prevails to any extent in American agriculture, he will promptly answer, "No; how could it?" and will proceed to explain why the thing is impossible. Far-fetched as this innocence will appear beside the facts, it is nevertheless so common as to be the rule; and the unclouded optimism of the American citizen is simply what is reflected in the land policy of the American nation. The immensity of her territory has blinded the Republic to the responsibilities that that very immensity

entails. It has never seemed to occur to her that a day would come when there would be no public domain to give away ; and the facts that it takes more to set up farming than the mere virgin soil, and that, as population increases, and as pre-emptible land recedes farther into the West, and as desirable land increases in price, it becomes more surely impossible for the man without means to establish himself as a land-owning farmer, seem never to have weighed with her law-makers. They have not paused to devise any national and systematic code of land laws ; and they have made no more attempt to regulate the relation of landlord and tenant than if that relation had no existence. Content with rendering as simple and generous as possible the process of obtaining a proprietor's title to the land, and with some provisions to hinder an undesirable devisement of estates, they have left the various States' legislatures, if ever the emergency arose, to plan whatever land codes they wanted for themselves. The inevitable result has followed. Of course the emergency arose ; of course the landlord and tenant system began to appear. As the settlement of the country proceeded, the land went up in value. The man of capital desired to invest in a rising stock. The landless poor man found it impossible to buy such high-priced acres ; and the poor man already in possession found it difficult to maintain his hold with Ahab's eye upon his vineyard. It is the ordinary process in conditions where money is omnipotent. Owners of large estates in agricultural districts soon learned that the most profitable disposition they could make of them was to let them in farms to tenants. They let them to tenants ; and then they called upon the States' legislatures, in which they held a controlling interest, to frame laws which would secure them against any loss. Probably the history of constitutional government does not furnish a more one-sided scheme of legislation than the landlord and tenant laws thus manufactured in the Western States. They are implements for extracting rent, as simple, terrible, and brutally candid in their design as a revolver in the hands of a peremptory road-agent. At any rate, they have resulted in fixing on the free soil of the United States a land system that belongs to the ages of barbarism. Its nearest surviving relative in Europe is the *métayage* of France ; but it is more like the *zemeendaree* and *ryotwar* of Britishized India than any land system now in existence.

III.

The census supplies an extraordinary illustration of the innocence—there is no other name for it—of the American people and government in this matter. The last Census Report, that of 1880, is the first to give any statistics as to agricultural tenures in the United States! Clearly the Census Commissioners, representing the average state of mind, did not suspect the existence of any land tenure in the United States but the one, pure, fee-simple proprietorship—at least to an extent that made it worth while investigating. So for sixty-five years, since the institution of the regular census, land tenures have been allowed to make what growth and pursue what vagaries they might, unrecorded by the official statisticians. What a commentary on this comfortable apathy is the state of things revealed by the first statistical inquiry!

At the Census of 1880, there were found to be 1,024,601 farms rented by tenants in the United States. That figure alone entitles America to take rank as possessing the largest tenant-farming class now furnished by any nation—a strange singularity for a nation, one of whose proudest boasts is that the old feudal institution of landlordism has obtained no foothold on her free soil! But to bring it nearer to the actual truth, that figure must be made bigger still. In the five years since the census was taken, it is a modest and well-considered calculation that the number of tenant-holdings has increased twenty-five per cent. This would raise the number of tenant-holdings at present in the United States to a million and a quarter. In Great Britain and Ireland, the countries that have clung most tenaciously to the aristocratic system, the number of tenant-holdings, according to statistics obtained during the late Parliament, is as follows: in Ireland, 547,222; in England and Wales, 414,804; in Scotland, 80,101—total, 1,069,127. Thus the United States, at the present day, possesses a quarter of a million more tenant-farmers paying rent to landlords than the Three Kingdoms and the Principality together. It contains more than three times as many as England and Wales; and more than twice as many as landlord-ridden Ireland. In the State of Illinois alone, which is neither an old Eastern nor a Southern State, there are, with a less population, nearly twenty thousand more tenant-farmers than there are in the ancient feudal kingdom of Scotland. By the time the next census is taken,

the probability is the number of tenant-farmers in the United States, increasing in pace with the population, will be up to a million and a half. And from that onward, for reasons which will appear, the ratio of increase in tenancies will be greater than ever.

Going a little further into the figures of the census, we find that the total number of persons engaged in agriculture in the United States five years ago was 7,670,493. Of this number, 2,984,306 are registered as nominal owners of their holdings, the remainder being tenants paying rent to landlords and agricultural laborers. Thus, at the first flash, the census shows the popular notion that the agricultural classes of the United States own the soil they till to be incorrect. In France, on the other hand, where the feudal system is not yet eradicated,* out of a population twelve millions less than that of the United States, there are in round numbers 5,000,000 rural proprietors, each holding less than twenty acres (from one to six hectares apiece), and cultivating the land with their own hands; while there are 2,000,000 of a class comprising owners of holdings larger than twenty acres, landlords, and owners of house property in towns.† It is a suggestive fact—to go no deeper than the surface of these figures—that France, with her expensive and restricted soil, has been able to place more than five million thrifty agriculturists in absolute proprietorship of their small holdings, while America, on her boundless virgin area, unhampered by title-deeds or traditions of past proprietorial rights, with her ever-growing population hungry for land, has been unable to establish quite three millions of proprietors, counting both great and small. And it is to be noted that the ratio of working proprietors of land in France is steadily increasing, and that of the tenants and landlords is steadily diminishing, while the reverse is true of the United States.

But the figure given in the American Census Report is too comprehensive. To get at the number of genuine rural proprietors, or working farmers who own the lands they till, in the United States, the estimate of the census must be considerably reduced. The 2,984,306 farms given as owned by their cultivators include farms of all sizes, from three acres up to a thousand acres “and

* There are still upwards of a million *métayers* in France.

† In the absence of the latest official statistics of French agriculture, these figures are taken from M. Léonce de Lavergne's great work, “*Economie Rurale de la France*,” which is generally allowed to be even a more accurate authority.

over." Can the owner of a farm of "1,000 acres and over," or, for that matter, of "500 acres and under 1,000 acres," be called a working cultivator, or (to use a word of undemocratic extraction, but which expresses more nearly than any other the general idea in the minds of Americans as to the class of men by whom they suppose the agricultural regions of their country are being occupied) can such a man be called a peasant proprietor? A thousand-acre holding is a considerable ranch, and its owner must be a capitalist of some kind, a stock raiser, or a "bonanza" farmer. If a "bonanza" farmer, since farming on that system has proved a failure, he has probably by this time broken up his ranch into tenant-farms of eighty acres and become a landlord. Nor does the census say at how much "over" a thousand acres it places the limit of size in its calculation, nor whether it includes as stock farms of "1,000 acres and over" the great ranges of the cattle barons. The likelihood is it does include these.

Again, the census does not specify how many of its 2,984,306 proprietors possess a clear title to their holdings. It is certain that this figure would sustain an enormous reduction if this specification were made or the number of genuine proprietors only returned. The inquirer is amazed at the extent to which farmers, nominally owners of their holdings, really hold the land under mortgage, and at the extent to which small farmers, in the westerly States and Territories especially, are plunged in debt. It is a very rare thing in the newer States to come across a farmer who has not a mortgage or a bill of some kind falling due on his land—if he be an "owner"—or on his crops or his stock or his machinery. Every other "owner" you meet, both West and East, is struggling to pay the interest on his mortgage, and seldom seems hopeful of lessening the principal. The grip of the money-lender is fast on the American farmer. His gilt legend, "Loans," strikes the eye with too significant frequency in every Western town. Who own these wasting farms, that you noticed during your day's ride, with their bleak frame shanties through whose unglazed windows the prairie wind sings? Ask the land agent, who is almost invariably the person that transacts loans and who unrolls before you a list of "improved" farms, in which he recommends you to invest rather than in the virgin soil. *He* owns them. What have become of their former proprietors? "Oh, various things; they were a shiftless lot for the most part; some went back East again and became tenant-

farmers; others moved farther west and pre-empted new land; some quit the country in the middle of the night when an interest was coming due—ran away from their honest debts, the rascals!" Others—but of these he omits to tell you—signed an agreement in his office, the same day they filed their pre-emption entry, to hand over to him for a sum of money the title to their homestead as soon as it was perfected according to the statute; it is one of the many ways of defrauding the nation of its public domain and throwing "improved" farms upon the market. In towns like Kansas City, Omaha, Sioux City, and St. Paul—and even in towns no bigger than Worthington, Minnesota—there are publications specially devoted to advertising "improved" farms for sale. I am convinced that had the Census Commissioners thoroughly discriminated, the number of small farmers in the United States genuinely owning their holdings would have been found to be something more painfully slender than even the 2,984,306 given in the report.*

IV.

If the public domain were really what it was forty years ago, or what it is in the eyes of most Americans still, an apparently illimitable area of glorious soil, its proportion would at once be dwarfed in the eyes of thoughtful people when they beheld the stupendous rate at which it was being squandered. When the historian comes to render his account of the disposition of the public land of the United States, it will be a record unparalleled in the history of the world. Uncle Sam will have whipped creation in that matter anyway! We are all more or less vaguely familiar with the story of the railroad grants, by means of which empires of the public land have been fraudulently seized by irresponsible corporations. Occasionally some speaker or writer asks attention for these things, but the public barely listens, and shrugs its

* This conclusion is in accord with that of two prominent American writers on the land question, Mr. Henry George and Mr. W. Godwin Moody. The latter, in his "Land and Labor in the United States," page 85, says: "Could the facts be definitely ascertained, I have not the least doubt that they would show that at least fifty per cent. of the small farm ownerships in the older States are merely nominal;—that that number at least of the small farmers in those States are so deeply in debt, so covered by mortgages, that their supreme effort is to pay the constantly accruing interest that a roof may be kept over the heads of the family—an effort that can have but the one ending. In the newer States is found a similar condition of things."

Indeed, there is no room for a difference of opinion on the point. The evidences stare the observer in the face.

shoulders. The other day the legislature of Texas, when it wanted to build a capitol, instead of making a bargain with an architect and contractor in the ordinary way, called in a company to save it the worry, and asked it to take over the whole job in return for a grant of three million acres of land! Such grotesque wantonness the American public witnesses with a helpless smile and the reflection that "there's more where that came from." But these are comparatively open transactions. No one can travel in the border States, where there yet remains some public land to be disposed of, and inquire among the land-offices there, without feeling that by paltry and occult methods the United States is being defrauded of nearly as much of its domain as by the depredations of railroad corporations and the extravagance of Texan legislators. In Dakota and Minnesota I have seen men farming land and paying half the crop as rent to quasi-landlords who actually had no title whatever to the holdings. They had filed timber culture entries, by which, on payment of a fee of \$14 and signing an agreement to plant ten acres of trees within four years' time, they were allowed to use one hundred and sixty acres of prairie land, to which their title would be perfected when the agreement was fulfilled. The entryman, under the timber culture act, is not compelled to plant any trees until the third year from date of entry, when if he likes he may file a relinquishment of his claim, and the land is again open for entry.* Thus a man without the faintest intention of planting a tree, or doing a stroke of work, can get possession of one hundred and sixty acres of land, let it to a tenant, and pocket a heavy rental—half the fruits of another's toil—for three years! The most astonishing thing about this is that such a man can find a tenant. Others file timber culture entries solely with a view to holding the land out of market until the growth of the community around it puts up its value. At the end of the third year the entryman will agree with another for a sum of money to make a written relinquishment so that the other may file a new entry on the spot. The second speculator will repeat the process, only charging a heavier consideration to the next entryman when the time comes for his relinquishment. So the process goes on, without a tree being planted on the land, and the honest settler is kept hopelessly out of it. This sort of thing is carried on by wholesale; and on a larger scale still are frauds perpetrated under the desert and timber land acts, which enable capitalists in combi-

* Act of May 14, 1880, Section I.

nation, by means of dummy entrymen, to appropriate miles of territory. The dummy entryman is also used by capitalists on an immense scale under the homestead and pre-emption laws.

Meanwhile the settlement of the country proceeds at its own bewildering pace. America is still presenting to the world the phenomenon of a population that doubles itself in periods of twenty-five years. Emigration is pouring in from all quarters of Europe, and from over the Canadian border, at a rate never before surpassed. It is certain that at the next census the population will be found to have increased more since 1880 than even during the preceding decade. From figures issued by the Census Bureau the other day, it appears likely that some of the Western States and Territories will go near quadrupling their population. Dakota has grown almost twice as populous in the five years since 1880, and Nebraska has increased from 452,402 in 1880 to 740,000 in 1885.

If there were still untold millions of fertile acres of public domain to be given away, and if a stop were put to the gigantic frauds by which the domain is now being swallowed up, it would be a matter of grave moment to consider how this population is to be accommodated on the land, and how it should be protected in possession of the nation's gift.

But it is no longer a question of untold millions of acres of public domain. It is no longer a question for to-morrow, it is a question for to-day. The pressure has already come. For all practical purposes of bestowing free farms on its growing population, the public domain of the United States is now exhausted.

According to the Reports of the Land-Office, the diminution of the public domain, by all methods, fraudulent and lawful, under the homestead and pre-emption, the timber culture, the desert, and other land acts, is taking place at the rate of 20,000,000 acres a year. And according to the same Reports there are just 5,000,000 acres of the public domain still left of a character that makes them available for settlers without capital.

Said the Land Commission, Report of 1880 : "It was estimated, June 30, 1879, that (exclusive of certain lands in the Southern States) of lands over which the survey and disposition laws had been extended, lying in the West, the United States did not own, of arable agricultural public lands, which could be cultivated without irrigation or other artificial appliances, more than the area of the present State of Ohio, viz., 25,576,960 acres." Of this arable land about 7,000,000 acres were taken up in the year ending June,

1880; and in the four years since then, so much more of it was absorbed that the 5,000,000 acres now declared to be remaining is a rather generous estimate.

The public domain outside of this includes only lands which are (1) totally unfit for agriculture, (2) lands which are only capable of being cultivated after great outlay of capital for irrigation or clearing, and which are open for pre-emption under the desert land act, (3) coal and mineral lands, (4) "lands likely to be segregated for private land grants still unsatisfied," (5) Indian and military reservations, and (6) the unsurveyed area of the Indian Territory, making in all something over 600,000,000 acres unavailable for homesteads.

The Government Land Commissioner in his latest Report sounds the note of alarm. He points out the rapid disappearance of the arable public land, and calls for the repeal of the timber culture, the pre-emption, and the timber and stone land laws. "The time has fully arrived," he declares, "when wastefulness in the disposal of public lands should cease;" "the time is near at hand when there will be no public land to invite settlement or afford citizens of the country an opportunity to secure cheap homes." *

The first palpable effect of the exhaustion of the public domain will be to put up the price of land. Last August I saw in Chicago land-offices, maps of whole counties of virgin prairie land which could not be bought for less than \$15 an acre. And in States like Minnesota and Iowa, it was impossible to find land of any good quality at all offered for sale at less than \$9 an acre. Even such a price as \$10 and \$15 an acre puts the land beyond the reach of the unmoneyed class of working farmers whom the nation is anxious to see thriftily settled on the public domain. One hundred and sixty acres at \$10 would cost \$1,600, and then—a fact which is strangely overlooked—even if a man gets a farm for nothing, he has to go to a large outlay before it begins to pay. He must buy expensive machinery (at the least a sulky-plow, a harrow, a seeder, a mower-and-reaper, and self-binder), a team of horses, a yoke of oxen, seeds, and he has to erect a house and barn, and purchase as much food for himself and family, and winter fodder for his stock, as will put him through

* Annual Report of the Commissioner of the General Land-Office for the year 1884.

the year that he must wait before he cuts his first crop. Very few homesteaders have cash enough to procure all this without going into debt. The majority of them do go into debt, and, with the eternal mortgage upon their belongings, they begin farming under a disadvantage that but a remnant of them ever triumph over. Those who wish to avoid debt or to get out of it have to endure privations that the Eastern farmer has no conception of. Indeed, the only class of settlers that seem fully capable of facing this experience are the Scandinavians, who seem born to struggle with a stubborn soil and climate, and who burrow in the earth sooner than go in debt for frame shanties. But the land that was \$10 an acre three months ago has been going up in price since, and will continue to go up by leaps and bounds. When there are no more far-distant patches of government land to be had by the hardy settler, he will have none but this high-priced land to choose from. How is he to possess himself of it? He simply cannot possess himself of it. Never again will such a man have the opportunity of winning by his toil and his courage a free home for himself in the United States. The land will have become the privilege of capital, and the hardy settler will have no alternative but to rent a farm and work it as a tenant, with no hope of coming nearer to being its owner after a lifetime of labor on it than he was the first day he broke its verdure with the plow. Thus from the day—now officially declared to be at hand—that the public domain is quite exhausted, the manufacture of a tenant-farming class will go on in the United States at an enormous rate. “We let most of our land in certain districts to tenants,” said a Chicago land agent to me, “because by that means, with the rents we get, we are often able to turn the original price of the land twice over in three years. We have sixty thousand acres now let to tenants. But we don’t keep it up; landlording needs supervision, and we do business on too extensive a scale to go in for it as a regular thing. It enables us to hold our land out of market until we get a fancy price for it. But many of the men we sell to keep on the tenants, only retaining one farm to work themselves. It pays better.” In fact, even now—before the public domain is yet altogether a tradition—tenant-farmers are being manufactured in the Western States by wholesale. Settlers have no other resource, and men who own land find it a vastly better investment to let it to tenants than

to work it themselves. They can get a preposterous rent—half the crop is a usual rent—and thus make a round income without working for it, having their time to devote to other pursuits or to idleness, while their principal, the land, is sustaining its great increment in value from the labor of the tenant and of the other tenants around who go to make the neighborhood a settled community. It is a fact that there cannot be a moment's doubt about—the tendency to landlordism in the United States is inevitable and immense. Even the owner of one hundred and sixty acres will, by and by, when land becomes still scarcer, find it more easy and enjoyable and far more profitable to break his lot up into small tenant-holdings, retaining only a few acres of kitchen garden for his private use. This conclusion, which is really palpable, can be submitted to a satisfactory statistical test. I have made up from the census, in groups, the distribution of the tenant-farmers over the various States :

STATES AND TERRITORIES.	NUMBER OF TENANT- FARMS.	STATES AND TERRITORIES.	NUMBER OF TENANT- FARMS.
North Atlantic Group:		Northern Central Group:	
Maine	2,718	Iowa.....	44,174
New Hampshire.....	2,615	Missouri	58,892
Vermont	4,762	Dakota.....	678
Massachusetts	3,140	Nebraska.....	11,419
Rhode Island.....	1,236	Kansas.....	22,651
Connecticut.....	3,126		
New York.....	39,872	Southern Central Group :	
New Jersey.....	8,438	Kentucky	44,027
Pennsylvania	45,322	Tennessee	57,196
South Atlantic Group:		Alaska	63,649
Delaware.....	3,708	Mississippi	44,558
Maryland	12,537	Louisiana	17,006
District of Columbia...	210	Texas.....	65,465
Virginia.....	34,896	Arkansas.....	29,188
North Carolina	52,722		
South Carolina	47,219	Western Group :	
Georgia.....	62,175	Montana	80
Florida	7,240	Wyoming	13
West Virginia.....	12,001	Colorado	584
Northern Central Group:		New Mexico	408
Ohio.....	48,573	Arizona	101
Indiana	46,050	Utah.....	433
Illinois.....	80,244	Nevada	136
Michigan.....	15,411	Idaho.....	89
Wisconsin.....	12,159	Washington.....	471
Minnesota	8,453	Oregon.....	2,286
		California	7,124

This table throws a remarkable light on the progress of American landlordism. What we look for first is neither a very old nor far Eastern or Southern State, nor a very new nor far Western State, but a State that in its growth has been subjected to the more or less modern conditions, and that has got beyond the transition stage, through which the newer States are now passing. Such a State will be found in the Northern Central Group, and it will be allowed without cavil that the most typical State of that group is Illinois. What do we find? That Illinois has gone deeper into the landlord and tenant system than any State of the entire Union! And if we look through the other States of the same group, Ohio, Indiana, Michigan, Kansas, Missouri, and even a State so new and so far west as Iowa, we behold a state of things equally astonishing. In less than ten years' time, States like Minnesota and Nebraska—which already possess a substantial tenant class—will have as many tenants and landlords as any of the others.

Looking now in another direction, we see that, with the exception of New York and Pennsylvania, the older Eastern States have not gone in for tenant-farming to anything like the same extent as the settled mid-Western States; and this, of course, is because they were settled up at a time when good free land was in fact—not in fancy—both plentiful and handy. The old plantation States of the South may stand out of our argument, as it may be urged that they had no alternative after the war but to transform the slaves on the plantations into tenants.

V.

A study of landlordism in some of the States where it most flourishes has revealed many remarkable things which cannot be referred to on this occasion. It may be remarked, however, that landlordism, in States like Illinois, is already taking on many of the features that distinguish it in the Old World. The crude nucleus of a landed aristocracy is being surely formed. In Springfield at present there dwell some two hundred landlords who live upon the rent-roll of properties in the middle of the State. Many of them were originally working farmers who, having the eye for land—what a French writer calls the *convoitise des champs*—managed to gradually patch together a considerable estate, and, having leased it to tenants, have come to the State capital to live at their ease.

The children of many of them are now picking up the airs of the great world in Paris and London. One landlord, whose estate I visited, owns forty thousand acres in one county alone, and this is less than half of his entire property. From these forty thousand acres he derives a rental in cash of considerably more than \$100,000 a year. He is not an American citizen, but an Irishman who has earned an unpleasant notoriety as a landlord in his own country. He lives in England, leaving his estates here to be managed by an agent, and contenting himself with a flying visit to this country once every four years or so. He does not even pay taxes to the country from which he draws his princely income. In his leases, one of which I possess, it is stipulated that the tenants shall pay yearly to the landlord "the full amount of all taxes or assessments, general or special, of every kind or nature whatsoever, made, levied or assessed upon or against" the land they hold from him. He must find a most enjoyable difference between landlordism in Illinois and landlordism in Ireland; for in Ireland the land law is now framed with some view to the protection of the tenant, and the tenant's representatives in Parliament have had some hand in the making of it; whereas the land law of Illinois is made altogether for the landlords and by the landlords, without a single one of its thirty odd clauses that can be construed as other than a device to secure that the tenant shall bleed to the full nomination of his bond.

VI.

The soil of a country is like the blood: once it is badly vitiated it seems impossible ever to cleanse it, and the poison keeps constantly breaking out. It was thus with Rome, whose public domain, though continually increased by conquest, was helpless to protect the republic from the consequences of early improvidence. Periods of distress, agitations, struggles between rich and poor, land laws made under terror of the fire-brand in the hands of hunger, are the phenomena which, like ulcers on the human body, mark the progress of agrarian disease throughout the course of Roman history. No remedy could succeed in stemming it. Though every agrarian law had for its object to establish the poor on small holdings on the public domain, and to break up the illegal monopolies of the rich, yet Rome ever failed to establish her peasant proprietors or to shake off the grip that monopoly was

once allowed to fasten on her vitals. The men of money evaded law after law, bought up officials, ruined the agitators, and the poor men worked their bonanza estates for them as tenants or as serfs, or came into the city to swell the vote-selling mobs of the purlieus. Feudalism, landlordism, usury, slavery, spread their humors over Rome's fair body. The ulcers became cancers, and the disease, so thoughtlessly admitted into the system, became the disease the patient died of in the end. "*Latifundia perdidere Italiam*," wrote the historian with the scientific precision of a physician closing the entry of an interesting case.

Does America, that looks to no conquests to add to her domain, whose day for purchasing Louisianas and Alaskas is over, America that is inviting the overflow populations of the world to take possession of her territory, and is giving to every one the privilege of citizenship, that allows even aliens to possess her soil—does America hope that the law of cause and effect will suspend itself for her benefit, or that the consequences which followed the mistakes of Rome will not follow like mistakes when committed by a republic of the nineteenth century? She would seem indeed to be confident that a miracle will happen for her protection, to judge by the stupendous recklessness of her policy in regard to the land. She is squandering her public land at such a rate that it would be rash to name the hour beyond which there will be a square foot of it still left; and she has allowed to intrench themselves upon her soil systems and conditions of land tenure that have spread ruin and misery wherever they have been given a footing in the Old World. Rome, even in the days of the Gracchi, was at least able to fall back on the fact that she had given no individual a fee-simple title to more of the public domain than the five hundred jugera deemed sufficient for a homestead, and that all who held more than that held it illegally. America seems anxious only to bestow her soil as completely out of her hands as possible, and to leave the proprietors of her mammoth grants as irresponsible as absolute monarchs in the disposition of their possessions. Even now agriculture, the pride of America as it was of Rome, is seeing its aspects revolutionized, is seeing the small proprietor being transformed into the tenant-at-will, the independent small holding passing away and its place taken by the large estate—the *latifundium*—with its landlord, its agent, its rack-rents, its oppression, its misery, and its hopelessness. How far otherwise the parallel may be ex-

tended between the two great republics of the world—and the Americans are no wiser, harder-headed, farther-seeing, or fonder of freedom and independence than were the fathers and citizens of early Rome—how nearly pointed on the course that Rome followed to her ruin, from democracy to plutocracy, from plutocracy to imperialism, is America to-day, it would be bootless here to conjecture. But there is a forecast one may make that is as practical as a meteorologist's storm-warning. It is that the day for an American Licinius has arrived who will reform the landlord and tenant tenures, remodel the homestead and pre-emption, the timber culture and desert laws under which so much fraud is perpetrated, and restrain the encroachments of monopoly upon the public domain. Let us hope, with an abiding faith in American human nature and law-craft, that the new laws will not be so framed that the men of money can evade them, and that the American Senator who takes the part of Licinius will not, like his cynical prototype, be their earliest violator. Let us hope that the evil may be checked in time before it take root and spread, and before it be left for some Tiberius Gracchus, in noble desperation, to shake the republic to its foundations, and fail of his object after all.

THOMAS P. GILL.

POSTSCRIPT.—Since the foregoing article was written, the startling Report of the Commissioner of the General Land-Office for 1885 has appeared—a document that confirms some of the worst anticipations above expressed. Land Commissioner Sparks finds that “the magnificent estate of the nation, in its public lands, has been to a wide extent wasted under defective and improvident laws, and through a laxity of public administration astonishing in a business sense, if not culpable in recklessness of official responsibility.” From the outset of his administration he was “confronted with overwhelming evidences that the public domain was being made the prey of unscrupulous speculation and the worst forms of land monopoly, through systematic frauds carried on and consummated under the public land laws.” The Commissioner gives most interesting particulars of these “frauds,” and recommends the immediate amendment of several of the existing land laws.